

# Contemplation on death

## *Maranānussathi*

(A translation of Pali stanzas)

### **1. We often hear of people dying**

Death comes to everyone who is born  
Just as a lamp burning in the wind is easily swept away  
Let's reflect on death in this same way.

### **2. Death comes to all**

To the rich and the poor  
Why not me? I will not escape death  
Death is sure to come my way someday.

### **3. Birth is followed by death always**

Just as an enemy that follows behind  
Seeking an opportunity to kill.

### **4. Life moves fast not halting a minute**

As the sun that has risen  
Hastens to set.

### **5. Life can end, like a lightning flash**

A bubble, a dew-drop or a line on water  
Death can be swift as a fatal shot.

### **6. Even the great Buddha with wisdom and power**

Had to let the body die as all beings die  
What could be said of this body of mine?  
Of course it must die, surely some day.

### **7. I can die in a twinkling of an eye**

For absence of food, sickness or injury  
What other fate can come my way?  
Death is sure as all must die.

## **Rationale for contemplating death:**

- Normal people (*putthujjhana*) lament when faced with death though they avoid thinking of death; and immerse themselves in sensual pleasures. This is only an escape from reality. “Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you die.”

- The purpose of this meditation is to face the reality of death and solve the problem of existence, which is death. The solution is not an escape into fantasy and hope for eternal life in heaven after death. It cannot be proved until death intervenes to dispel all doubts. The solution is to understand existence, which begins at birth and ends in death. Existence is a delusion, and so is death.

- Death is the problem of existence. One who exists has to die. Death is part of existence not the opposite of existence. We cannot speak of death without speaking of existence. One has to exist before one can die.

- Is existence a fact, however? Do we really exist? What is existence?

- To exist is to occupy space and time. It is the body that occupies space. The mind does not occupy space. Does it occupy time?

- To occupy time is to have a past, a present and a future. The body does occupy time. The past of the body is birth and the future of the body is death. The present is decay, which is changing.

Does the past exist? It has gone. Does the future exist? It has not come. Does the present exist? It is becoming the past every fraction of a second. Do we then really exist? If we do not exist, can we really die? Both existence and death are delusions, said the Buddha. Then there is nothing to worry about. But we all worry about death because we think we exist. Our belief in existence is irrational. It is only an emotional feeling. When the mind is free of emotions the feeling of existence disappears. Only then can we be happy.

- So let us begin to meditate and free the mind of emotions. Emotion is a motion of the mind. The mind free of emotions is the mind that is still. Don't be lazy to still the mind.

- This meditation on death is to create a sense of urgency and fear, which helps overcome laziness and drowsiness (*thīna middha*) that reduces mental alertness during meditation.